



Dr. John Henry Erskine: A Yellow Martyr

Walter T Hughes Jr

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John Henry Erskine, MD (1834-1878) "was a young man of large mold, physically perfect, very tall and very strong. His handsome face was lighted with a perpetual smile. Good nature, good heart and cheerful soul were convictions his manner carried to every beholder. He was a manly man." So go the words of his eulogy after he died a martyr serving his patients during the catastrophic Yellow Fever epidemic of 1878 that destroyed Memphis. This biography chronicles his life from birth and early childhood in Huntsville, AL, to college at the University of Virginia and New York University School of Medicine where he received a MD degree at the age of 24 years; to military service in the Civil War where he rose from a young Assistant Surgeon to Medical Director of General Johnston's Army of 100,000 men, having served gallantly on the front line at Shiloh and other major battles; and, to postbellum Memphis where he resumed his medical practice, was elected Health Officer for the city and worked to exhaustion and death in the Yellow Fever epidemic. The last chapter, "The Irony of it All," carries a somber message to a civilized society.



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